I wanted him to reach England in the charge of an English person, not an Italian."

He saw that Luella was looking uncomfortable and he went on quickly: "I assure you that the Duke will welcome his son. It is just that there has not been enough time since Tia's funeral for me to find someone like yourself to take Enrico to England." He smiled and putting out his hand laid it on Luella's. "I am very, very grateful," he said, "in fact I think as I waited outside the Cathedral you must have come to me in answer to my prayer."

He stopped speaking for a moment and then went on: "Who could be more suitable to take the Marquess to his father the Duke, than the daughter of so distinguished a writer?"

There was nothing Luella could say, at the same time she felt extremely uncomfortable. When she found her voice, she said: "I think what you must do, Signor, is to write immediately to the Duke and tell him that Enrico is on his way or, better still, send a telegram."

The Signor made a very Italian gesture. "Telegrams, my dear young lady, are too often a disaster. They never appear to arrive at their destination, however carefully they are inscribed."

"Then, please, you will write?" Luella persisted.

"But of course I will do that, as soon as you have left," the Signor promised. "But it will not arrive before you reach England. You can, however, alert the Duke that it is on its way."

"Then promise me you will not forget," Luella begged.

"How could I forget anything, dear lady, you ask of me?" he replied in honeyed tones.

Luella was suspicious all the same that he would not keep his promise. It was too late now to suggest they should stay longer in Italy and wait until the Duke was aware that they were on their way. She took the letter which the Signor had handed her. It was addressed to the Duke, and she put it into her handbag.

As if he had no wish to talk about it further, the Signor then gave her some money for the journey. "This is just to buy anything you need for yourself," he explained. "The courier will settle all the tips as well as seeing to your tickets."

"You are . . very kind," Luella murmured.

As she spoke the door of the room where they were having tea opened again. The Signor sprang to his feet. This time it was a middle-aged man with whitening hair who looked, Luella thought, as if he might be the courier.

The Signor hurried towards him, and again took him into a corner where he talked to him earnestly. Again there was an exchange of money, and finally the Signor came back to the table bringing the courier with him. "This, Signorina," he said, "is Alberto Drago."

Luella shook him by the hand and he replied in good English that it was a privilege to escort her to England. The Signor then looked at a gold watch he took from his waistcoat pocket. "It is time," he said, "for us to go to the station." The luggage was collected by a porter and the courier went ahead to purchase the tickets.

There was a long wait before the train arrived at the station. Luella knew that Signor Vecchio was